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ABSTRACT

High school students examine the structure, function, services, finances, politics, and budgeting of county governments provided in this unit containing five lesson plans. Students interview all available county officials to obtain the widest viewpoint possible on the structure and function of county government, then rank the functions as most and least necessary. They also identify which municipalities are controlled by which political parties and discuss how county government is affected by the two-party system. Detailed instructions for a simulation game on county budgeting outlines commissioner and official roles for negotiating a budget. Each lesson plan lists objectives, discussion questions, activities, and resources. (KC)

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COUNTY GOVERNMENT

A CURRICULUM GUIDE

SO 014 418

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On behalf of the Department of Education, State of New Jersey, I wish to bring the Institute for Political and Legal Education to the attention of educators throughout the nation. The program has made a significant contribution to the education of high school students about the American political, governmental, and legal processes and thus should be of interest to educators, parents, and students.

Fred G. Burke

Dr. Fred G. Burke
Commissioner of Education
State of New Jersey

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In 1974, the political education program was validated as successful, cost-effective, and exportable by the standards and guidelines of the United States Office of Education. As a result the program is now funded through ESEA, Title III as a demonstration site to provide dissemination materials and services to interested educators.

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COUNTY GOVERNMENT CURRICULUM GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Before the advances in communication and transportation made in the twentieth century, the county was the largest unit of government with which most citizens had any direct contact. In rural areas especially, counties became centers for the administration of health, educational and welfare programs, for payment of taxes, for keeping of records on births, deaths, property ownership, and debts, for the maintenance of roads, for meting out justice, and many other services. Even today, in many small-town rural areas of the country, the county unit remains an important political center.

For residents of cities, on the other hand, the municipal government is the center of political decision-making, and counties are of lesser importance. Legally, the traditional functions and services of county governments described above were considered as responsibilities of the state. The county was only a local agent carrying on tasks which could not be as easily handled from the state capital. In recent years, the trend has been toward giving the county additional responsibilities, especially in areas like water and sewage, planning and zoning, and fire protection which, at one time, were considered strictly municipal services.

County governments in general are organized around governing bodies and a complex diversity of officers, boards, and commissions. The terminology used to describe these positions is quite varied. The pattern is not a uniform one, not even *within* some states. Most county governing bodies have little control over their own structure, since most organizational details are prescribed by either state constitutions or state laws.

A few generalizations can, however, be made about government at the county level in the United States:

1. With the exception of a few urban counties, there is no chief executive for the county. The common pattern is to have a group of elected and coequal administrators.

2. The separation-of-powers principle (so carefully delineated at the state and national levels) is not important in most county governments. The same person or persons may perform in the roles of legislators and executives, and even exercise some judicial powers.

3. County governments have grown haphazardly and rarely have been revised or altered in the ways that local governments have been. However, the basic problems of structure and function in county units are recognized. In many states there are recommendations for changing and strengthening county governments to make them more administratively efficient and more responsive to the problems and needs of their residents (see pp. 11-14).

This curriculum guide includes specific lesson plans for the classroom and optional activities designed to support the basic objectives. The amount of in-class and out-of-school time devoted to this unit of study on county government will depend on the interests of the students and teacher. The objectives for this unit are as follows:

1. Students will be able to describe and evaluate the structure of their county government.

2. Students will be able to identify problems which resulted from the development of county government in its context as a middle-level unit of governance.

3. Students will be able to identify the selected services provided by their county government.

4. Students will be able to discuss the ways in which county governance is affected by the practice of the two-party political system.

5. Students will be able to explain the taxation process of their county government

6. Students will be able to identify the relationship between finances and the operation of county services.

UNIT PLANS

County Government Structure and Function

Assign students to interview all available officials regarding the structure and function of county government to obtain the widest possible variety of viewpoints.

The reports which result from the following interviews will form the basis for the first activity of this unit. Advance preparation is therefore required for successful operation.

The students should interview the following individuals or agencies:

Freeholders or Commissioners
County Administrator
Municipal Officials
State Senators/Assemblymen
Public Health Agency
General Services Agency
Welfare Board
Civil Defense Agency
Sewer Authority
Public Works Agency
County Election Board
Planning Board
Family Counseling Agency
Children's Shelter
Community College
Social Services Agency
Community Affairs Agency
Community Action Program
Area Development Council
Local citizens

The following questions are suggested when interviewing freeholders or commissioners:

1. How do you feel about the fact that most of the county budget is beyond your control?

2. To what degree do you feel that you can exercise administrative control over various county agencies?

The following questions are recommended when surveying municipal officials and/or state senators/assemblymen:

1. How do you view the role of county government?

2. Do you think that county government functions to the best of its ability?

3. Do you think anything can be done to improve the functioning of county government?

The following inquiries are suggested for a discussion with various county agencies:

1. How do you feel about the relationship between your agency and the board of commissioners or freeholders.

2. How would you rate the effectiveness of your agency?

3. What do you think contributes to the success or failure of your agency?

Other Possible Activities:

Guest Speakers--Invite the county clerk or a member of the Board of Commissioners (or Freeholders) to speak to the class in regards to the structure of county government.

Charting--Based on all available information through a class discussion, construct a diagram suggestive of the structure of county government.

County Government Services

Students should rank the following governmental functions into these relative categories: (A) Most vital, (B) Necessary, (C) Secondary, and (D) Least vital.

GOVERNMENTAL FUNCTIONS

Water Pollution Control
Water Supply
Solid Waste Disposal
Flood Control
Welfare
Services to the Aging
Health Services
Road and Bridge Maintenance
Parks and Recreation Facilities
Area-wide Planning (land use development)
Community Colleges
Vocational Educational
Criminal Justice

Suggested Approach:

After the students have outlined their priorities individually, they should be formed into small groups (3-5). The function of these small groups is to construct a priority ranking scale for the above listed services that reflects the values of the majority of each body.

A spokesman from each group should be selected to report to the entire class. After each group has reported, it is suggested that comments by other group members be encouraged, and thereafter the class should construct a priority scale by consensus.

Alternative Activity Suggestions Related to Services of County Governments:

Identification based on research—Students clip news articles from area newspapers relating to county government. The teacher then lists the topic of the article (for example, parks, county college) and asks the class to separate these topics into categories of services. Recommended Resources—Local or state newspapers only.

Guest speaker—County clerk, who addresses the class on services provided by the county government. Recommended Resources—County clerk may be contacted at the county Administration Building.

Development of services log—Upon identification of various services provided by county governments, the students will prepare a scrapbook log, which will include photographs of parks, offices, courthouse, and county colleges and a brief accompanying annotated explanation. Selected students from the class may then, if they so desire, make a presentation to a senior history class or community service groups concerning services provided by county government. The class may also wish to prepare a slide presentation in addition to, or in place of, the county services log. Recommended Resources—The county clerk's office will provide necessary information.

Class trip—To County Administration Building—Note: This trip is not a day off from school. Students are to observe the number of offices, staff, titles on offices, machinery, etc. Students interested in a certain area of county government should identify their interests beforehand so that they may spend some extra time in this area of the county building. Recommended Resources—The County Clerk's approval and cooperation are necessary. Please contact this individual several months before visiting the building.

County Government and Two-Party Politics

Development of Two-Party Influence Chart. Class develops Influence Chart to encourage discussion of county governance.

1. Development of Chart is as follows:

   a. Obtain copy of county map (from County Clerk's Office).
   b. Outline map on several transparencies.
   c. Have students identify which municipalities are controlled by Democrats and Republicans (i.e. party affiliation of Mayor and a majority of Council; a phone call to their Borough Hall will attain this information). Then assign a color—red, blue— to each Party and color the map accordingly.
   d. Find out which municipalities received the most:
      (1) Funds
      (2) Services
      Compare to who controls the municipality. Also compare to which party controls the Freeholders or Commissioners Board.

2. Recommended Question for Class Discussion:

   a. What conclusions can we draw from this chart?
   b. How is county government affected by the two-party system?

County Finances and Budgeting

Suggested Activities:

Guest speaker—Secretary to the Tax Board (preferably; if not, a member of the Tax Board) will explain the taxation process of your own particular county to the class. Contact the County Administration Building to make arrangements.

Class discussion—

1. Obtain a copy of a tax duplicate from the county clerk's office. Distribute copies of the tax duplicate to the class. Ask students what appear to be the strengths and weaknesses of the county's taxation process.

2. Obtain a copy of the county budget (allocation of dollars for selected services) from the clerk's office. Ask students: Will more services be needed in the future? Where will monies come from?

Simulation Game on County Budgeting

County government in New Jersey and some other states is a creature of the State Government. It is not an independent middle-level government capable of dealing effectively with area-wide or regional problems. Freeholders are the elected officials in perhaps the least enviable position in New Jersey. Local officials have wide areas in which they may legislate to promote the "health, safety, or morals . . ." of their respective communities. State legislatures are subject only to the restraints of the New Jersey and United States constitutions and federal law. Freeholders, however, find themselves in a situation wherein their budget is largely beyond their control, and independent agencies make the decisions which control the delivery of services to county residents.

The following simulation game is designed to acquaint students with difficulties of budgetary decisions under the freeholder system of county government. With some adaptations in terminology it can be used in other states as well as New Jersey. The instructor should distribute the roles to selected individuals. The department heads should conduct nine meetings simultaneously with the freeholders. The freeholders should discuss with the Executive Administrator the proposed budget. The board members by majority vote should mutually determine a budget reflective of the concerns of the county.

The following note should be distributed to each freeholder *only*:

> It is budget preparation time and your role requires you to accomplish two phases of activity. You must first meet with the professionals under your committee's control and establish their budgetary needs for the next fiscal year. You must then meet with the remainder of the freeholder board and arrive at a budget that will be supported by a majority of the board.

The following note is intended for department officials *only:*

> The Executive Administrator and perhaps your freeholder committee chairman will attempt to persuade you to cut your budget but you will do whatever possible to insure that the department receives ample funds.

All simulation participants should receive a copy of the following budget:

COUNTY BUDGET

	1974	1975 Requests
General Services	$ 1,000,000.	$ 1,200,000.
Health & Welfare	18,000,000.	25,000,000.
Public Safety	2,000,000.	3,000,000.
Public Works and Sanitation	2,000,000.	2,500,000.
Administration & Finance	50,000,000.	60,000,000.
Parks, Recreation & Planning	1,000,000.	1,400,000.
Judicial Services & Constitutional Offices	1,000,000.	1,250,000.
Institutions & Agencies	8,000,000.	10,000,000.
Intergovernmental Relations & Human Resources	17,000,000.	25,000,000.
Total	$100,000,000.	$128,250,000.

ROLES:

Freeholder Smith:

General Services Committee

a. Architecture & Engineering*
b. Buildings & Groups
c. Garage & Motor Pool

Freeholder Jones:

Health & Welfare Committee

a. Public Health
b. Central Index
c. Pastoral Care

Independent or semi-independent agencies within your general committee area:

d. Welfare Board
e. Mental Health Board
f. Bergen Pines Hospital

Freeholder Turner:

Public Safety Committee

a. County Police
b. Public Safety Education
c. Narcotics Coordinator

Independent or semi-independent agencies within your general jurisdiction:

d. Prosecutor
e. Medical Examiner
f. Civil Defense
g. Weights & Measures

You are freeholder Director, and two freeholders of your party, including yourself, are up for reelection this year; therefore, you must be associated with as small a budget increase as possible. You believe that a $105,000,000 budget will be the most you can accept without jeopardizing your election.

*Agencies listed directly under each committee are within the freeholder's *direct* control.

Freeholder Burns:

Public Works & Sanitation Committee

a. Public Works Agency

Independent or semi-independent agencies:

b. Sewer Authority
c. Mosquito Control
d. Transportation Board

Freeholder Peters:

Administration & Finance Committee

a. Treasurer
b. Auditor
c. County Counsel
d. Purchasing
e. Personnel
f. Adjuster
g. Public Information

Independent or semi-independent agencies:

h. County Tax Board
i. County Election Board
j. Inheritance Tax Board

You are running for re-election this year and desire *no* budget increase.

Freeholder Cump:

Parks, Recreation & Planning Committee

Independent or semi-independent agencies:

a. County Park Commission
b. Planning Board

You are running for re-election this year and will hope to have *no* budget increases.

Freeholder Rhodes:

Institutions & Agencies Committee

a. Children's Shelter
b. Conklin Home

Independent or semi-independent agencies:

c. Superintendent of Schools
d. Community College
e. Vocational Schools
f. Special Services School
g. Housing Authority

Freeholder Getz:

Intergovernmental Relations & Human Resources

a. Social Services
b. Community Affairs
c. Office on Aging

Independent or semi-independent agencies:

d. Agriculture Extension Service
e. Bergen Community Action Program

f. Area Development Council
g. County Museum
h. Cultural & Heritage Commission

Freeholder Downs:
Judicial Services & Constitution Offices
a. Family Counseling
b. Law Library

Mr./Ms. Farrow, Executive Administrator of Finance

You are under pressure from the freeholder director to allow *no* increases in the budget, but you realize that you will have a general rebellion on your hands if you don't find justification for *some* increase. You have determined that perhaps the Board will accept a 10 percent increase and, therefore, you must decide where to cut back the requests from $128,250,000.00 to $110,000,000.00. You must meet with department heads and find where excess exists in order to offer a $110,000,000.00 proposal to the freeholders.**

Mr./Ms. Chancellor, General Services Director

You must convince Freeholder Smith and the Executive Administration to increase the budget by $200,000.00 to cover new snow plows and increased architectural and engineering expenses.

Mr./Ms. Williams, Public Health Director

You must convince Freeholder Jones and the Executive Administrator to increase the budget by $7 million to cover the additional cost of health delivery services producing new programs.

Mr./Ms. Stevens, Chairman, Welfare Board

You must join with the Public Health Director to convince Freeholder Jones to raise the committee budget by $7 million as $2 million of this increase will be used to maintain your department at present status.

Mr./Ms. Douglas, Narcotics Coordinator

You must convince Freeholder Turner to increase the budget by 50 percent in order to increase your staff and perform as required.

Mr./Ms. Phillips, Civil Defense Director

You must cooperate with Mr./Ms. Douglas in requesting a 50 percent increase in the budget in order to establish the disaster coordination units that are necessary.

Mr./Ms. Mahony, Public Works Director

You must convince Freeholder Burns to increase your budget in order to repair the four county bridges that have been in need of repair for months. Your budget request represents the *minimum* amount required for the task.

**Consult budget form distributed to participants for budget increases in all cases.

Mr./Ms. Downs, Transportation Board Director

You must cooperate with Mr./Ms. Mahony to convince Freeholder Burns that the budget request represents the minimum possible expenditure if the feasibility plan for the county bus system is to operate this year as the Board has authorized.

Mr./Ms. Simmons, Purchasing Department Director

You must convince Freeholder Peters that the increased cost of supplies and materials makes it necessary for at least an additional $10 million in funding or it simply will not be possible to provide the traditional county services.

Mr./Ms. Cramer, Personnel Director

You must join with Mr./Ms. Simmons in defending your budget request as the county employees will accept nothing less than an 11 percent cost-of-living pay raise.

Mr./Ms. Johnson, County Election Board Chairman

You may cooperate with the other department heads meeting with Freeholder Peters as your $1 million request is the absolute minimum necessary for you to perform your Constitutional functions. You don't care about the other departments but you *will not* allow cuts in your request.

Mr./Ms. Metzger, Planning Board Director

You must convince Freeholder Camp that your budget request is the *minimum* amount necessary to finance a study of the alternatives available to the county for the development of the Meadowlands.

Mr./Ms. Hill, Family Counseling Director

You must convince Freeholder Downs that the $250,000 additional expenditure requested is necessary to handle increased case loads which have expanded from 4,035 in 1973 to 6,141 in 1974 with projections of 8,000 in 1975.

Mr./Ms. Carson, Housing Authority Director

You must convince Freeholder Rhodes that, in order to provide only the same services next year, your budget *must be* increased.

Mr./Ms. Harrison,
Bergen C.A.P. (Community Action Program) Coordinator

You must convince Freeholder Getz that your program has been successful and that, with only *modest* increases, significant studies can be undertaken to move Bergen's underprivileged population toward self-respect.

Mr./Ms. Case, Office on Aging

You must join Mr./Ms. Harrison to convince Freeholder Getz that your budget request should not be cut since the senior citizens of Bergen County have only recently developed any confidence in the delivery of services to them.

Following the completion of the simulation, request, for purposes of evaluation, the answers to these questions:

1. Why was the budget decided upon in its present form?

2. Why was it more or less than the year before?

3. How did you feel as a committee head or board member in deciding budget allowances?

COUNTY GOVERNMENT IN NATIONWIDE PERSPECTIVE[1]

The following information is provided for background only to give students and teachers an added perspective on the structure and function of county level government. Throughout the nation, a variety of alternative approaches are being tried or are under consideration to provide efficient county government to meet the needs of today and tomorrow. These alternatives are presented here under the following headings: Cooperative Approach; One-Government Approach; Two-Level Approach; and Structural Modernization.

The Cooperative Approach

The cooperative approach can be defined as voluntary cooperation between units of local government to provide services or aid to surrounding areas with similar problems.

Greater Cleveland, Ohio (Cahyouga County)

In the Cleveland area the county government and government of the center city play a positive role in providing services to the other governments of the region. Cleveland itself acts as a primary contract supplier of sewage, water, and civil defense services. The county government is the most prominent supplier of street maintenance, public health services, public welfare, sewer management services, and jail facilities. Extensive interlocal agreements also are in use.

Metropolitan St. Louis, Missouri

Another pattern of cooperative action can be shown in the example of St. Louis. In 1950 the government of St. Louis County was greatly strengthened by passage of a reform charter that provided for county provision of contract services with local government. Over 4/5ths of St. Louis County local governments including all urban areas have signed a total of 241 contracts with the county for provision of services ranging from electrical inspection to tax collection. But St. Louis itself has not cooperated and has not made a significant contribution to progress in this endeavor.

Los Angeles County, California: The Lakewood Plan

The most extensive utilization of the cooperative approach has taken place in Southern California. Presently, all 76 municipalities in Los Angeles County participate in cooperative agreements which now number approximately 1,500. Thirty-five services are available to local governments within Los Angeles County on a contract basis. The type of services rendered by the county are broad. They range from ambulance service, license issuance for businesses, and tree trimming to such services as assessments and tax collection, planning and zoning, law enforcement and fire protection. The plan is strictly voluntary in nature. The key concept here is the idea of a "package of services." Although the "package of services" concept is central, no two cities have the same package. The number of services provided to the municipalities ranges from four in two cities to all 45 in 6 cities.

The One Government Approach: City-County Consolidation

The most striking fact encountered when examining this alternative is that most of the success achieved by such consolidation has been due to the impetus of outside forces: i.e. four of the most successful

[1]Adapted from *County Government: Supplementary Readings and Research Materials.* State of New Jersey, County and Municipal Government Study Commission.

movements transpired before the turn of the century, and were achieved at the behest of state legislatures: New Orleans in 1813, Boston in 1821, Philadelphia in 1854, and New York in 1893. Only three other areas outside of several localities in Virginia operate as a single unit of government today: Baton Rouge-East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana (1947); Nashville-Davidson County, Tennessee; and Jacksonville-Duval County in Florida.

Baton Rouge: East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana

Passed by the voters in 1947, this plan evolved in a way unique to the politics of Louisiana. The Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish Plan involved only partial consolidation. Both the city and Parish governments were retained but interlocked in an interesting way. The 7 members of Baton Rouge City Council and 2 members from rural areas constitute the Parish Legislative body. The Mayor-President, who serves as chief administrative officer of both governments and presides over both councils, has no vote. He may appoint directors for finance, personnel, public works, and a purchasing agent. The council acts to appoint the attorney, clerk, and treasurer of the county.

The other unique aspect of the Baton Rouge experiment was the establishment of taxation and service zones within the area. The county government provides urban type services (police, fire, garbage and refuse service, street lighting, traffic regulation) to areas of primary service needs.

Public works services are provided on a county-wide basis, and provision is made for city type services in outlying areas by use of special taxation districts to pay for them. There can be no further incorporation in the area; however, annexation to the urban service district may take place with the approval of the area concerned and the Parish council.

Nashville-Davidson

The structure of the combined Nashville-Davidson governments is: 1) a strong executive, titled the Metropolitan County Mayor; and 2) a legislative body, the Metropolitan County Council, made up of 40 members elected by the voters. The mayor appoints directors for finance, fire, law enforcement, clerk's office, public works, water and sewer. He also appoints members to such groups as the county zoning board, civil service commission, Metropolitan Board of Education, and the Metropolitan Board of Health. Though there are several other elected officials within the county, the county structure is actually that of a strong executive plan.

Jacksonville-Duvall

The latest manifestation of this approach took place in 1968 with the creation of the Jacksonville-Duvall consolidated government. It is significant to note that this booming suburban area is the largest single municipality in the United States with a land area of almost 800 square miles. The area has experienced a tremendous population growth going from approximately 200,000 in 1940 to over 525,000 in 1968. Salient aspects of the consolidation plan are: 1) a popularly elected mayor with the power to appoint administrative aids and department heads, subject to council approval; and 2) a 19-member council, 14 elected by district and 5 at-large, make up the legislative body of the county. One of the more significant aspects of the Jacksonville-Duvall merger is that protection for taxpayers is built into the plan, i.e., no citizen pays for urban service unless he receives those services. The Jacksonville-Duval county government went into combined operation on October 1, 1968.

The Two-Level Approach

American local government traditionally operates on the framework of our federal system, which is designed to provide for two relatively autonomous levels of government. It is not surprising therefore that

several areas have considered and adopted federal type plans to provide for county growth. The most successful of these and the most applicable to the American political process is the Miami-Dade County Metropolitan Federation (Miami-Metro).

In July, 1957, Dade County, Miami, Florida, became the first county in the United States to adopt the comprehensive urban county concept. The Miami area, fast growing and fast changing, had undergone considerable governmental change. This expanded Dade County government has taken on the popular name of Metro.

The charter provided for a revitalized county structure, run by county manager, as well as the continuance of the 27 municipal corporations (26 original) within the county's geographic boundaries. Dade County which encompasses 2,054 square miles was empowered to provide a full range of services from building expressways and operating mass transit lines to furnishing parks and beach erosion control.

Despite the tribulation that comes with any governmental change, the Miami experiment has succeeded. Several times in the stormy political history of the Metro concept crippling amendments have been voted down. Today Miami remains one of the most rapidly growing areas in the United States.

Structural Modernization

The following section outlines three possible modernizing plans that have been used elsewhere to modify the structure of county government, making it more responsive to the people.

The County Manager Plan

The Council-Manager Plan as it manifests itself in county government in the United States features a popularly elected legislative body which provides for passage of laws, ordinances, and policy matters, and for the selection of a professional manager who provides day-to-day administration of county governmental functions. The appointed executive serves at the pleasure of the council for an indefinite term and is responsible for enforcing all laws and ordinances. He also makes appointments to major executive posts, supervises all department heads, prepares the budget and recommends possible action. The County Manager Plan is similar to the council-manager options of the Faulkner Act in New Jersey.

The Chief Administrative Officer

A growing number of urban counties have adopted an appointed executive plan with the executive subordinate to a governing body to a greater degree than is the case under a strict council-manager program. Thus, the position of the chief administrative officer is similar to the business administrator position so popular among the larger areas of New Jersey. The differences between a strict council-manager plan and the chief administrative officer concept is that under the latter the budgetary powers of the chief administrative officer are generally more limited and he rarely has the power to appoint and remove department heads.

The Elected Executive Plan

The most important aspect of the elected chief executive concept is that it provides for *separation of powers* between the legislative and executive branch. The legislative body is elected and its principal responsibility is to make the laws, ordinances, and other policies of the county. It may have certain quasi-administrative powers, such as the approval of high level appointments recommended by the chief executive.

The executive branch of the government is headed by a chief executive elected at large for a specific term of office. He is usually responsible for preparing a legislative program for the council's approval, implementing the council's policies, and for the general administration of county government. Most elected executive plans provide for a strong executive similar to the strong-mayor plan. Thus, the chief executive would enjoy the power of veto that can be overridden by an extraordinary majority, the power to hire and fire department heads and other officials, and considerable leeway in the use of council appropriated funds.